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Infrastructure Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

August 3, 2021

Attendees

- Colleen Bailie — West Haven Public Library
- Joe Campbell — Connecticut Technical High School System
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- George Claffey — Central Connecticut State University
- Burt Cohen — Office of Consumer Counsel
- Tom Dillon — Independent
- Karen Fildes — New Fairfield Public Schools
- Kerri Kearney — Manchester Public Schools
- Ryan Kocsondy — Connecticut Education Network (CEN)
- Sabina Sitaru — Aquiline Drones
- Rick Widlansky — Libraries Online (LiOn)
- Rob Wilson — Somers Public Schools

Agenda

- Federal Broadband Funding
- Eduroam Outreach and Updates
- Cybersecurity Needs and Legislation
- Open Education Resources

Welcome

Infrastructure Advisory Council Chair Tom Dillon called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM and provided a brief overview of the meeting agenda. He asked Doug Casey and Burt Cohen to introduce the first topic regarding federal broadband programs.

Federal Broadband Funding

Doug provided highlights of the two current programs to fund Internet connections for education. The Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) serves as a credit of up to \$50 for households to purchase Internet service. Those eligible for food stamps, Medicaid, free or reduced lunch, and other programs qualify for the EBB credit. Doug noted that there is strong alignment of eligibility criteria with programs run by the State, and so the Governor's office is coordinating EBB outreach through various agencies that may be able to target communications to qualifying individuals and households.



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Whereas EBB benefits broad swaths of the population, the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) is an education-specific program to support schools and libraries. It acts as an "E-rate to the home" and is run by the Universal Services Administrative Company (USAC), which also oversees E-rate. The ECF program has a similar application process and will award funds to offset the cost of cellular-enabled devices and home Internet service for students and library patrons. Doug noted the upcoming filing deadline of August 13, 2021. He offered to help members and other leaders to raise awareness of these programs to help get Connecticut's population of disconnected and under-connected individuals online with high-speed Internet service.

Colleen Bailie mentioned the work taking place at West Haven Public Library to help patrons sign up for EBB. She noted the importance of having highly accessible materials available to audiences who may not understand technical terms or even basic concepts such as modems, upload and download speeds, etc. Doug shared with the group the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) EBB outreach toolkit, with materials in multiple languages for printing and use in social media and other digital formats: www.fcc.gov/emergency-broadband-benefit-outreach-toolkit.

Burt Cohen, who leads broadband efforts for the Office of Consumer Counsel, shared updates from the federal infrastructure bill making its way through Congress. The draft legislation includes \$65B for connectivity, with \$1B set aside for middle-mile fiber expansions to anchor institutions through public networks such as the Connecticut Education Network (CEN). The bill provides \$42.5B in block grants to states, with at least \$100M for CT to expand broadband access. To ensure equitable access, the legislation includes anti-discrimination (i.e., "digital redlining") provisions and budgets \$2.7B over five years for digital literacy and digital navigator programs. Under the proposed law, the EBB program would continue as the Affordable Connectivity Program, with an allocation of \$14.2B to provide eligible households up to \$30 month per month in credits toward Internet service.

George Claffey brought up the issue of trust when encouraging people to engage in free programs. He provided the example of the partnership between Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) and the New Britain branch of the [Community Health Center](#) to provide free healthcare services on the campus of CCSU. While the mobile bus has helped to raise awareness of the services, getting people to come to CCSU remains a challenge. Relevant relationships remain key to encouraging people to sign up for no-cost programs. For that reason, CCSU has asked its financial aid office to lead EBB outreach efforts, given the strong alignment between students who take out loans and the EBB-eligible population.

Whether they are offered free healthcare or free Internet, some individuals remain skeptical of such promises. The group agreed that a lack of trust can vie against the success of such programs. Burt also noted that the EBB signup process can be



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complicated, though he lauded the work of the FCC to design and launch the program in a short period. He expected the end-user experience to improve over time.

Kerri Kearney underscored the negative experience of some Manchester families in getting online. Her team assisted 60 – 70 households to sign up for free Internet through the program, but only 20 have completed registration. She suggested that if the State promotes the EBB and other programs, it should work with carriers to ensure that onboarding of new customers is smooth. Doug welcomed this recommendation and shared a link to EBB [signup totals to date](#).

The group concluded the discussion by pointing to the importance of storytelling. Getting firsthand testimonials from people who have benefitted from getting online to support remote work, learning, telehealth, and other applications should help encourage adoption through marketing efforts. George offered the assistance of the CCSU Communications Department, which produces videos, reports, and testimonials as part of class project work. By example, [Associate Professor Darren Sweeney](#), a broadcast journalist, frequently has students gather and produce video-based interviews. To support awareness of Internet access, these testimonials might be about the impact of broadband on the lives of Connecticut residents. There are multiple sections of this course taught by multiple professors at CCSU who could be approached for the start of the fall semester. In line with George's idea, Colleen Bailie suggested an EBB signup day at her library and the opportunity to film and share footage from that event. In the interest of time, the group agreed to continue these plans outside the current meeting.

Eduroam Outreach and Updates

The CEN team recently launched a page on Eduroam (ctedunet.net/eduroam), the authentication technology that will be in place at hundreds of additional sites through the Network's expanding Community Wireless initiative, funded by federal relief dollars. Students and faculty at schools and universities that use Eduroam to support authentication will be able to log onto these access points seamlessly.

Tom shared his enthusiasm for the session on Eduroam that took place as part of the CEN Conference on May 13 and asked whether any additional school districts had expressed interest in deploying Eduroam. Ryan agreed that the session went well and confirmed that several districts would like to use Eduroam as a community-based solution for connecting students and staff outside of school. He highlighted a few needs to support the effort, including program and technical assistance with deployments. Another barrier to adoption is the terms of service that institutions must sign when using Eduroam. He suggested that enlisting the help of a K – 12 law firm to review and endorse these standard terms would streamline adoption.

Both Ryan and Doug underscored the power of reporting data that comes with Eduroam use. Schools and universities can demonstrate the impact of the investment



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by showing where guests log into their networks via Eduroam as well as where their students get online outside of school. Despite the benefits of using Eduroam, several school leaders have expressed a need for a broader footprint of the system before dedicating the resources to deploying it locally. Tom suggested that introducing city and town leaders to the promise of Eduroam might help build awareness and commitments to its rollout across the state. Ryan clarified that Govroam serves the needs of government entities, Eduroam those of the education community, and the umbrella Anyroam serves both municipal and education needs. Rick Widlansky offered to deploy Eduroam at some pilot library buildings through his organization as a way of encouraging schools to consider adopting the platform and to create stronger ties between schools and their local libraries. Ryan welcomed the offer and concluded the conversation by sharing that CEN has drafted a brief survey to send this fall to garner interest in and readiness to deploy Eduroam in Connecticut schools.

Cybersecurity Needs and Legislation

The Council members next addressed the topic of cybersecurity. Doug noted the provision of funding in the draft federal infrastructure bill that would support state and local efforts to protect institutions and individuals from online threats. Rick had raised this topic prior to the meeting and shared the need he sees for staff and patron training. He has seen many phishing attempts, including a recent series of incidents in which bad actors invite individuals to apply for jobs and so share their personal information with these third parties. Rick noted the availability of free training from the [Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection](#) (DESPP), though those events have not attracted large audiences. Ryan agreed and added that CEN has promoted DESPP's resources. Colleen echoed the need for training. She has provided instruction to both her staff and patrons on how to identify phishing and other schemes as well as overall "cyber hygiene" practices.

Ryan welcomed suggestions on additional, network-level protections that CEN could afford. The Network already provides distributed denial of service (DDoS) and filtering, which have prevented and mitigated thousands of cyber-attacks since the deployment of these services. He has considered the addition of intrusion detection and prevention (IDS and IPS) to the core services that CEN offers. Colleen shared that West Haven Public Library and other libraries use Deep Freeze to wipe computers after patron use to prevent the spread of downloaded malware. Tom echoed this need, pointing to the problem of maliciously encrypted hard drives by bad actors who demand ransom in exchange for the release of data on those computers and servers. Ryan agreed and reiterated the importance of putting in place protections from within (e.g., filtering and dependable backups) as well as from outside a network, such as IDS and IPS.

Open Education Resources

The Commission has built an open education resources (OER) repository, www.GoOpenCT.org. Doug underscored the benefits of creating, curating, and sharing



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OER to provide broad access to free, high-quality, standards-aligned teaching materials across schools and institutions of higher education. He encouraged Advisory Council members to create accounts and explore the site, still in beta testing. He is working with the host, [ISKME](#), to design training sessions for school and college administrators and expects a full launch of the site this fall. Kerri Kearney expressed interest in using the site to support the needs of Manchester Public Schools, and Doug agreed to provide additional support and background resources for getting started.

Also related to digital learning, Doug reminded the group to contribute to and share the link to the Commission's online survey, <https://tejoin.com/824683559>. The simple prompt asks members of the education community to share practices adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic that should continue.

Adjournment

Tom closed the meeting with thanks to the Advisory Council members for contributing agenda items, engaging in rich conversation, and advocating for equitable access to learning opportunities statewide. He concluded the meeting at approximately 2:30 PM.